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The Mercury News

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HUMAN ERROR

The number of fatal collisions in the Bay Area rose from 2010 to 2016, and some experts point to a rise in 'distracted driving'

DEADLY DRIVES

LAURA A. ODA — STAFF ARCHIVES

The California Highway Patrol investigates a fatal accident during the morning commute on Oct. 4 that involved seven cars on Highway 4 west of Railroad Avenue in Pittsburg. In 2016, there were 455 fatal crashes compared to 318 in 2010.

By Erin Baldassari
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The Bay Area's roads are getting more dangerous — and not just for motorists crowding the region's highways. Increasingly, cyclists and pedestrians are getting killed on city streets, too.

The number of fatal car, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian collisions in the Bay Area jumped 43 percent from 2010 to 2016, according to newly released data from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the region's transportation planning agency.

Yes, there are more people in the Bay Area living and driving here, which could account for some of the increase, said David Vautin, a researcher for the MTC. And, yes, more drivers are traveling from further away on increasingly long, mind-numbing commutes.

But, the rise in population and the growing number of miles commuters are traveling still don't explain the uptick in the number of people dying on Bay Area highways and roads during that time, he said. There were 455 fatal crashes in 2016, compared with 318 in 2010. Five of the six years showed increases in fatalities, which followed four previous years of declines. But 2016 wasn't the high point. In 2003, there were 509 fatal crashes, the most in the 16-year span studied.

Some experts point to the rise in "distracted driving," people texting, calling or checking Facebook on the road, he said. Others blame the slowdown in life-saving advancements, like seat belts, anti-lock brakes, or shatter-proof windshields that manufacturers were quick to adopt, while new breakthroughs haven't had as widespread a reach.

But, ultimately, the real culprit is human error, said Stephanie Mak, a data analyst with the MTC. She looked at fatal crash reports between

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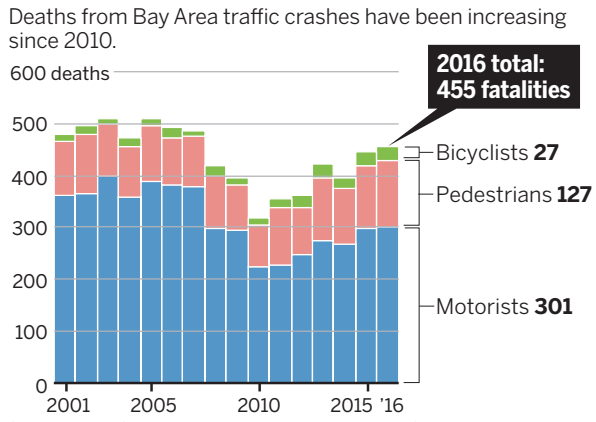
ROAD FATALITIES ON THE RISE

Deaths from Bay Area traffic crashes have been increasing since 2010.



Source: Vital Signs, Metropolitan Transporation Commission

PAI/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

NOAH BERGER — ASSOCIATED PRESS ARCHIVES

Some experts point to a rise in "distracted driving" for the increase in fatal collisions between 2010 and 2016.

SAFETY STRATEGY

JAE C. HONG — ASSOCIATED PRESS

High winds bend palm trees in Ventura, where powerful gusts are driving multiple wildfires across Ventura and L.A. counties.

Utilities pull plug to head off fires

When high-danger conditions exist, more providers may cut power to protect the public

By Paul Rogers
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With strong winds blowing and bone-dry conditions, utility officials in San Diego on Thursday began shutting off the power to thousands of people — a pre-emptive move to reduce the danger of power lines sparking wildfires.

It's a controversial approach that may soon become a growing trend across California.

As huge fires continued to envelope parts of Los Angeles and Ventura counties, San Diego Gas & Electric cut electricity to 12,000 customers in San Diego County by Thursday afternoon, after Santa Ana winds reached 88 mph in some rural areas.

Even though no fires were burning in San Diego County on Thursday morning, the utility notified up to 170,000 customers that they could have their power shut off by Saturday as a safety precaution, and that electricity in some affected communities wouldn't be back on until Monday.

"We recognize the inconvenience to our customers and appreciate their patience," said Joe Britton, a spokesman for San Diego Gas & Elec-

POWER » PAGE 8

Online extra: For the latest on the wildfires in Southern California, visit our website at MERCURYNEWS.COM

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Franken resigns, takes shot at GOP

Multiple accusations in recent weeks led to pressure from other Democrats

By Ed O'Keefe, Elise Viebeck and Karen Tumulty
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — In a stunning close to his congressional career, Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., on Thursday announced that he will resign amid multiple allegations that he touched women inappropriately, becoming the second lawmaker to step aside over such accusations in three days.

Yielding to pressure from other Democrats, Franken said he will leave Capitol Hill in the "coming weeks," but he continued to deny allegations of groping and unwanted advances from more than a half-dozen women.

The accusations began three weeks ago with an essay written by Leeann Tweeden, a host on KABC radio in Los Angeles. Tweeden said that Franken groped her breasts and kissed her without her consent in 2006 while

FRANKEN » PAGE 8

WIN MCNAMEE — GETTY IMAGES

Sen. Al Franken, center, D-Minn., leaves the Capitol with his wife, Franni Bryson, left, after his speech Thursday.

Online extra: For the latest news on politics, scandals and more, visit MERCURYNEWS.COM.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FIRES

WIND-DRIVEN FLAMES RAGE

MARIO TAMA — GETTY IMAGES

Firefighters monitor a section of the Thomas fire Thursday along Highway 101 north of Ventura as strong Santa Ana winds push wildfires across a wide swath of Southern California, torching hundreds of homes. STORY, PAGE 4

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